

Report to: East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

Date of meeting: 6 March 2025

By: Deputy Chief Executive

Title: Audiology services in East Sussex

Purpose: To consider the Review Board's report on audiology services in East Sussex.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) consider and agree the report and recommendations of the Review Board attached as Appendix 1; and
 - 2) agree to refer the report to NHS Sussex for consideration and a formal response to the recommendations.
 - 3) schedule to receive an update from NHS Sussex at its September 2025 meeting.
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1. Background

1.1. On 30 July 2024 the HOSC considered a report from NHS Sussex on the provision of audiology services in East Sussex. This followed concerns brought to the attention of the Committee by a number of sources, including Healthwatch, about access to audiology services in East Sussex. Audiology services are commissioned by NHS Sussex and are focussed on the assessment, prevention, and treatment of disorders of hearing and balance, including treatment for earwax blockages. Audiology services are delivered across primary, acute and community healthcare settings.

1.2. Having considered the report, the Committee agreed to establish a Review Board to examine the provision of audiology services in order to understand the identified issues further and make recommendations for improvements to these services.

1.3. The Review took place over a series of meetings held during the period of November 2024 to February 2025, which examined a range of evidence, including from NHS Sussex, East Sussex Hearing, Healthwatch, East Sussex County Council officers, VCSE organisations and Audiology staff from the East Sussex Healthcare Trust (ESHT). The scope of the review included:

- Issues related to the current provision of, and access to, NHS audiology services, including earwax removal and hearing aid services.
- How communication of audiology pathways and local NHS provided services can be improved.
- Future commissioning arrangements, particularly related to the ongoing commissioning of the over-55s age related hearing loss contract, and how identified issues and barriers to access can be addressed through this.

2. Supporting information

2.1. The report of the Review Board is included at **Appendix 1** and contains the findings and recommendations of the Review Board. The Review Board comprised Councillors Abul Azad, Colin Belsey, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Christine Robinson (Chair) and Alan Shuttleworth.

2.2. The Review Board considered evidence from a range of witnesses and sources and based on the evidence it heard concluded that community audiology and earwax removal services in East Sussex are currently unsatisfactory and have substantially diminished since before the COVID-19

pandemic. The Board has therefore made a number of recommendations which it considers will improve the current and future provision of audiology services in the county. The Board has also recommended working with Healthwatch and ESCC officers to monitor and review the new service model.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The HOSC is recommended to consider and agree the Review Board's report and recommendations and agree to refer it to NHS Sussex for consideration and a formal response.

3.2 The Review Board concluded that ongoing monitoring of the service was important, particularly as NHS Sussex progresses with the procurement of the new community hearing aid service. The Board therefore recommends to the HOSC that an update report from NHS Sussex on audiology services be scheduled for the Committee meeting in September 2025.

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